

How to Stop Worrying and Deal With the Bomb

The authors offer an optimistic formula for coping with the threat of nuclear destruction.

REDUCING NUCLEAR DANGER

The Road Away From the Brink.

By McGeorge Bundy, William J. Crowe Jr. and Sidney D. Drell.

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By Len Ackland

DEFENSE SECRETARY LES ASPIN made an extremely important observation during his Oct. 29 news conference. "The cold war is over; the Soviet Union is no more. But the post-cold-war world is decidedly not post-nuclear," Mr. Aspin said. The authors of "Reducing Nuclear Danger" couldn't agree more.

Indeed, the trio of McGeorge Bundy, William J. Crowe Jr. and Sidney D. Drell go further, warning us in this slim volume that "it is not at all clear that the overall level of nuclear danger has gone down." While the risk of global nuclear war is vastly diminished, the breakup of the Soviet Union has brought new hazards and the international community still has not developed an effective means for preventing proliferation.

From a single superpower, the Soviet Union has fissioned into four nuclear weapons states — Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Belarus and Kazakhstan have agreed to relinquish their nuclear arms, but have not yet done so. Ukraine, which now possesses the world's third largest nuclear arsenal, has played

both cat and mouse in seeking economic and political gains from the weapons on its soil. Noting that these three nuclear systems pose danger and temptation, the authors urge the United States to cajole Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan into rapidly transferring their weapons to Russia for storage or dismantlement.

A stable, moderate Russia willing to insure effective control of nuclear weapons, and capable of doing so, is, of course, the key to reducing nuclear danger. "To keep nuclear danger down in Russia, the United States must do its full part to help to insure that Russian democracy survives and grows strong," the authors write. The urgency of their point was vividly underlined by the Moscow street battles of early October.

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The dramatic strategic arms reduction treaties negotiated with Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin promise a reduction in long-range nuclear weapons to 3,000 to 3,500 on each side. Yet, the authors argue, levels of 1,000 to 1,500 warheads apiece would give each country ample assurance that nuclear attack would be deterred and that the other nation could not quickly regain strategic superiority. "If the reductions now in prospect are carried out successfully, the United States and Russia may well be ready by the year 2000 — and perhaps sooner — to go to one of these lower levels," they write. Nor, they add, are these the lowest obtainable levels.

It is good to read this optimistic prognosis from three such established men: Mr. Bundy, the national security adviser to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson; Admiral Crowe, a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Mr. Drell, a prominent physicist and deputy director of the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center. And their assessment is in no way diminished by the fact that it isn't original. Even

before the Soviet Union split apart, the National Academy of Sciences recommended in 1991 that the American strategic arsenal be cut to 1,000 to 2,000 weapons if there was "continued favorable experience in U.S.-Soviet nuclear relations."

Longtime students of the nuclear arms race will find other familiar themes in this book, as well as a couple of surprises. The authors blast the nuclear age's "habit of secrecy" and the public's "unjustified belief that only experts with access to secrets could understand these matters." They call for more openness from the "unannounced nuclear-weapon states: Israel, India and Pakistan." They urge that the International Atomic Energy Agency be reformed so it can better address the spread of nuclear weapons technology.

And in discussing the need for a comprehensive test ban treaty, the authors cut Mr. Drell a path to retreat strategically from his earlier position about the need for additional American nuclear tests to insure warhead safety, an argument that alienated him from many of his arms control colleagues. "Reducing Nuclear Danger" concludes that early achievement of a comprehensive test ban treaty is "more important to worldwide nuclear safety than further improvement in the safety of part of the U.S. nuclear force."

Although specialists will find items of interest in the book, it is aimed at, and deserves to reach, a much wider audience. It is a readable, cogent overview of the nuclear challenges of the post-cold-war world and the cooperative steps that should be taken by leaders in Washington and abroad. "It is time," the authors write, "to replace the inherited distinction between those countries with nuclear weapons and those without by a wider assertion that all nations should be on the same side — against nuclear danger — whatever their present degree of reliance on nuclear weapons." □

Len Ackland, director of the University of Colorado's Center for Environmental Journalism, is a former editor of The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.